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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PGDV, PREL, SOCI, AF, PK

SUBJECT: THE ROAD TO TIRAH: MAY BE LONGER THAN IT LOOKS

1. SUMMARY: MUCH ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID RECENTLY IN THE PAKISTANI PRESS TO THE CONSTRUCTION NOW UNDER WAY ON A ROAD INTO KHYBER AGENCY'S TIRAH VALLEY, TRADITIONALLY AN "INACCESSIBLE" AREA TO THE PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT. UNDER THE TRADITIONAL ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE GOP AND THE BORDER TRIBES, A ROAD IS AN "ADMINISTERED AREA" AND ACCESS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IS PERMITTED. ALTHOUGH CONSTRUCTION HAS BEGUN, OPPOSITION TO THE PROJECT SEEMS TO BE GROWING AMONG THE AFRIDI AND ORAKZAI TRIBESMEN IN THE AREA, AND THE GOP-ZAKHAKHEL ALLIANCE WHICH IS SPEARHEADING THE ROAD COULD HAVE TROUBLE MAINTAINING THE PROJECT. END SUMMARY.

ASSIGNED WILL EARN A SMALL PLACE IN HISTORY.

4. THE TRIBAL ADMINISTRATORS WITH WHOM WE SPEAK SEEM QUITE SATISFIED WITH THEIR ACHIEVEMENT IN OBTAINING THE CONSENSUS OF THE ZAKHAKHELS TO BUILD THE ROAD AND SEEM DETERMINED TO PUSH FORWARD RAPIDLY TO BUILD IT. ONE OFFICIAL WHO DEALS DIRECTLY WITH THE KHYBER TRIBES BOASTED THAT THE ROAD WILL BE COMPLETED "EVEN BEFORE THE AMERICANS KNOW ABOUT IT." THE PRESS OF DECEMBER 29 REPORTED THE COMMENCEMENT OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE 16-MILE LONG ROAD. HOW FAR AND HOW FAST THIS ROAD CAN BE BUILT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ENVISION A TWO-PHASE, TWO-YEAR PROJECT. BT

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3. THE TIRAH VALLEY IS IN MANY WAYS THE INNER-MOST SANCTUM SANCTORUM OF THE AFRIDI TRIBE, AND INDEED OF THE ENTIRE TRIBAL AREA. ITS INHABITANTS, ORAKZAIS AND AFRIDIS, RELYING ON THEIR NATURAL TALENT FOR GUERRILLA WARFARE AND THE RUGGED TERRAIN OF THE AREA, HAVE DEFEATED FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN THEIR AREA SINCE 1620, WHEN THEY KILLED MUGHAL EMPEROR JERANGIR'S GENERAL GHAIIRAT KHAN. SLIGHTLY LATER, THEY PUSHED BACK THE EMPEROR AURANGZEB'S CAMPAIGN IN THE AREA. THE BRITISH, TOO, WERE UNABLE TO BRING THE TIRAH UNDER THEIR CONTROL DESPITE SIR ROBERT WARBURTON'S DIPLOMACY AND THE DISPATCH OF THE TIRAH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE OF 35,000 MEN UNDER SIR WILLIAM LOCKHART IN THE FALL OF 1897. TO DATE, PAKISTANI OFFICIALS MAY NOT SET FOOT IN WHAT THE AFRIDIS DESCRIBE AS A "RIVAL OF KASHMIR." AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROAD, AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE GOP WHICH A ROAD BRINGS, WOULD MARK A GREAT STEP FORWARD IN THE GOP'S LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE OF INTEGRATING THE TRIBAL AREAS INTO PAKISTAN. SHOULD THE ROAD BE COMPLETED, THE GOP OFFICIAL TO WHOSE CREDIT IT IS

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5. SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION AND COMMENCEMENT OF ROAD LAYOUT, OPPOSITION TO THE PROJECT HAS BEGUN TO BUILD, AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE HAS BEEN AT LEAST ONE BOMB BLAST ON THE ROAD ITSELF. IN PARTICULARLY, MALIK WALI KHAN KUKIKHEL HAS MADE HIMSELF THE ARCH-OPPONENT OF THE PROJECT. (HE IS ALSO ARCH-RIVAL OF MALK MADIR KHAN ZAKHAKHEL, FOR ASCENDANCY AMONG THE ENTIRE AFRIDI TRIBE, AND IN TRIBAL PSYCHOLOGY COULD NATURALLY BE EXPECTED TO OPPOSE WHATEVER MADIR KHAN FAVORS.) KUKIKHEL AND HIS FOLLOWERS HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROAD COULD TRIGGER OFF THE "THIRD WORLD WAR" SINCE THE DRA GOVERNMENT CAN BE EXPECTED TO OPPOSE A ROAD SO CLOSE TO THE AFGHAN BORDER. AMONG THE AFRIDIS, THERE ARE ALSO OTHER GROUPS WHO OPPOSE THE ROAD. SEVERAL JIRGAS (TRIBAL ASSEMBLIES) HAVE BEEN HELD IN RECENT WEEKS IN LANDI KOTAL AND BARA, IN WHICH PARTICIPANTS ASKED THE GOP TO STAY AWAY FROM TIRAH AND NOT TO INTERFERE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE TRIBES AND THREATENED TO BLOCK CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROAD. SO FAR, THERE IS NO VOCAL OPPOSITION FROM THE ORAKZAIS. THE ZAKHAKHEL, FOR THEIR PART, ARE DESCRIBED AS "80 PERCENT IN FAVOR" OF THE ROAD; THEY ARGUE THAT WITHOUT THE ROAD, THEY ARE UNABLE TO BENEFIT (AS DO THE KUKIKHELS) FROM THE SMUGGLING MARKETS OF LANDI KOTAL AND BARA. TO OPEN THE TIRAH, THEREFORE, IS THE ONLY WAY TO DEVELOP THE SMUGGLING TRADE AMONG THE ZAKHAKHEL.

6. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE ROAD IS TO BE BUILT ENTIRELY IN THE ZAKHAKHEL AREA, SO ZAKHAKHEL VIEWS BEAR CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT. NONETHELESS, IN THE TRIBAL AREA, OPINIONS CAN CHANGE OVERNIGHT AND THE CONSENSUS SWORN BY SOLEMN OATH CAN SUDDENLY SHIFT. THE GOP SEEMS TO BE COUNTING ON BUILDING THE ROAD BEFORE THE TRIBESMEN CHANGE THEIR MINDS. CONTROVERSY WILL DOUBTLESS CONTINUE.

7. KABUL MINIMIZE CONSIDERED. EASTHAM BT

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